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SUBJECT: UN SPECIAL ADVISOR ROCK EXPRESSES DEEP CONCERN
ABOUT FORCED RECRUITMENT OF CHILD SOLDIERS AND
DETERIORATING RIGHTS SITUATION IN SRI LANKA

REF: COLOMBO 1887

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Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr. for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a November 13 briefing for Co-Chair and other selected Ambassadors, UN Special Advisor for Children Affected by Armed Conflict Allan Rock expressed his deep concern about forced abductions of children by the LTTE and the breakaway Karuna faction. Rock received many eyewitness accounts that the GSL security forces often openly assist the Karuna faction in its child abductions. Rock also lamented the deteriorating human rights situation in Sri Lanka, and the climate of impunity due to the failure of the Government to enforce laws and protects its citizens. Rock reported his findings to Sri Lankan President Rajapaksa, who professed not to be aware of the collusion between his security forces and the Karuna faction, and undertook to establish a special investigative unit to investigate all of Rock's charges and then punish those responsible. Rock plans to prepare a written report for UN Special Representative for Children Affected by Armed Conflict Radhika Coomaraswamy. His report will recommend a special investigative unit that is credible, with human rights monitors from Louise Arbor's office to be deployed in each of the six major geographical regions of Sri Lanka. End Summary

Climate of Impunity

¶2. (C) Rock spent eight days in Sri Lanka, visiting the cities of Ampara, Batticaloa, Killinochchi, Anuradhapura, Jaffna and Colombo. In each he met with the Government

Agents, military commanders, senior police officials, civil society and NGO representatives, and the families of child victims.

13. (C) Rock said he had found a consistent pattern of fear and insecurity, a climate of impunity, and a situation where "the fabric of society is disintegrating," where police and military cannot be relied on to maintain order or enforce laws and local institutions are ineffective so there is no remedy to the extensive problems faced by the Sri Lankan people. Furthermore he heard that anyone who speaks up becomes a target of one side or the other or shadowy factions and militias such as the Karuna group. He said the Tamils of the east face harassment by local authorities, and threats from the Karuna faction. They have no sense that their rights can be respected.

Empty LTTE Promise for Action

14. (C) Rock met for two hours with LTTE leader Thamilselvan in Killinochchi regarding child recruitment. Despite the LTTE's professed respect for children's rights, Rock found that the LTTE actively recruits child soldiers, has not fulfilled its action plan commitments, and has no plans to do so. Rock said that he and Thamilselvan worked out a plan under which Thamilselvan pledged to work with UNICEF on a mechanism to release all child soldiers under the age of 18 by January 1, 2007 with progress to be reported on a week-by-week basis until then. Thamilselvan also committed to work with UNICEF on a protocol to train LTTE military commanders on child recruitment issues and establish a disciplinary process for violators. Thamilselvan categorically refused Rock's quest for UN access to LTTE camps. Rock admitted he had no illusions that the LTTE would keep to its pledge.

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Karuna Faction Also Responsible and....

15. (C) Rock met in Colombo with the Chief Political Officer of the Tamil Makkal Vidutalai Pulikkal (TMVP), which is the new name of the Batticaloa-based Karuna Group which broke away from the LTTE in 2004. She blithely denied that TMVP was recruiting or abducting children or had any soldier under the age of 18. Rock dismissed her blatant lies calling her a "real amateur." The TMVP representative told Rock the TMVP has no policy on child recruitment, but is developing one. Rock commented that the Karuna faction in fact has been very active in forcible abduction of children. He cited UNICEF figures that show that as of October 31, 2006, the Karuna faction has forcibly abducted 156 children, 100 since May alone.

Receives Active Collusion from GSL

16. (C) In what will be his most explosive finding Rock said he had found strong and credible evidence that the Karuna faction was forcibly abducting children with the collusion and at times active help of government security forces. He noted that many TMVP offices are located near army camps and that numerous eyewitnesses have seen Karuna militia pass through government checkpoints unmolested while everyone else was subject to extensive searches and checking of paperwork. In Batticaloa, parents of abducted children told Rock that security forces conducted a round up of all children in a given village from which Karuna militiamen hand-picked and abducted those they wanted. In another instance parents told of security forces coming one day to photograph selected children. The next day Karuna militia kidnapped those same children. In all such cases Rock charged there had been an "abject failure" on the part of the government to investigate these crimes.

President Rajapaksa unaware

¶17. (C) Rock reported all these findings to President Rajapaksa earlier in the day. The President said he was not aware of the collusion between his security forces and the Karuna faction. He undertook to establish a special investigative unit to investigate all of Rock's charges and then punish those responsible. He agreed to Rock's request that Rock make this public at a press conference Rock would hold later in the day.

Next Steps

¶18. (C) Rock said he plans to prepare a written report for UN Special Representative for Children Affected by Armed Conflict Radhika Coomaraswamy. He said his report would contain action recommendations, including how to fashion a special investigative unit that is credible. Rock said he would also likely press for human rights monitors from Louise Arbor's office to be deployed in each of the six major geographical regions of Sri Lanka. He realized that the GSL will likely resist this recommendation. Ambassador Blake thanked Rock for his presentation, which the Ambassador said tracked closely with the Embassy's own findings. The Ambassador recommended that for this special investigative unit to be credible, Ms. Coomaraswamy's office would need to remain closely involved either by appointing someone to work directly with the unit or at a minimum by tracking closely the unit's efforts. Rock agreed.
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